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Transplanted Family Enjoys New Grounds

By Moya Stone



Lica Handa with daughter Jane Photo Moya Stone

I pull up in front of the Lafayette home and see Lica Handa waving to me from the large front window. Waving back I spot a spry little girl running around Lica, clearly excited by the prospect of a visitor. When I reach the front door, we all exchange animated greetings and the warm welcome makes me even more interested to get to know Lica and her family.

We met while rehearsing in the St. Perpetua Church choir. There was little time for chats, but I did learn that Lica moved to the Bay Area from Japan with her husband and daughter. A concert pianist, Lica had a much better command over the sheet music than I and she came to my aid from time to time.

There are two things that stand out in the Handa home: the grand piano in what would be the dining room and three-year-old Jane. This is an apt reflection of Lica's new life in Lafayette. "We lived in Tokyo. I was playing concerts and always in a hurry," explains Lica, pausing briefly. "There wasn't much time for Jane, but now I have much time for Jane." After the hustle and crowds of Tokyo, Lica is enjoying the slower pace and vast space of California. She says she loves the

greenery and flowers surrounding her home and the more moderate weather. Lica's husband, Mitch works as a trader for Barclays Global Investors and was transferred to San Francisco in November 2007. The family lived in the city briefly while they researched where to settle. "I wanted the American suburban experience for my family," says Mitch, who has lived in various places around the U.S. and like Lica, appreciates the open space and weather in Lafayette. "This is the nicest place I've ever lived."

While Lica and I visit, Jane bounces back and forth between us and her dad in the other room. Sporting a cute bob hairdo, she tells me she likes her preschool and has made lots of friends. Jane was only a year-and-a-half when the family moved and she had a little trouble adjusting. "She'd wake up and cry," says Lica. "She didn't know where she was." But now Jane is happy. Recently she was baptized at St. Perpetua Church. She goes to Old Firehouse School every weekday, which is when Lica gets a chance to practice the piano and practice her new passion: baking.

Lica takes me into another room and shows me two shelves of dessert cookbooks, all in Japanese. She bakes twice a week and shops at Diablo Foods for the ingredients. Tiramisu is her latest creation and Mitch says she's enjoying the big kitchen, a rarity in Tokyo.

Suburban lifestyle suits Lica, who was born in San Diego but moved to Tokyo when she was three months old. Her father studied engineering at UC San Diego for three years and then returned to Japan to work for the Ministry of Defense. Lica started playing piano when she was four. At 12, she went on tour to Canada, the U. S. and Mexico. That's when she knew she wanted to do this for life. "It was exciting," says Lica. "I thought, oh, this is a good world." For six years in the 1990s, she lived in Munich studying piano. Back in Tokyo she taught piano and performed.

Now Lica plays piano for St. Perpetua and she'd like to volunteer to play for retirement homes, which she did in Japan. When she's not tickling the keys or baking goodies, Lica is trying her hand at gardening and writing a blog as a way to share her American life with her family in Japan. Before I leave, Lica plays Bach's Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring, which is as much of a sweet treat as her tiramisu.

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